



## Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers September 2, 2008

*Take the High Road*  
**Share the Road • It Belongs to Everyone**

Drive Safely Work Week 2008  
October 6-10

### Drive Safely Work Week, October 6-10, 2008 – Start Preparing Now!

On average, your workers are more likely to die (on or off the job) from a traffic crash than any other cause. One of the best ways to keep employees safe on the road is to educate them about safety and promote safe driving practices. That's why we're inviting you to be a part of the National Drive Safely Work Week Campaign, October 6-10, 2008, sponsored by the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety. Employers across Michigan and the nation are taking this opportunity to improve the safety and health of their employees by preventing traffic related deaths and injuries. For **free resources and ideas** on how to get involved visit <http://www.trafficsafety.org/dsw08/dsw.asp>. All you have to do to receive the free resources is to register and answer several very brief questions about your company.

### Americans Driving Fewer Miles; Funding Still Goes to Roads

Americans drove 12.2 billion fewer miles this June than in June 2007, continuing an eight-month decline. The 4.7 percent decrease is the largest monthly drop since the decline began in November. Since then, Americans have driven 53.2 billion fewer miles than over the same time period a year earlier. The biggest declines are occurring in large states with miles of open space. An AARP poll found that more than two-thirds of respondents over age 50 are driving less because of fuel prices. Four in 10 said they have used public transportation, rode a bicycle or walked more frequently lately, but the AARP is concerned communities don't have the infrastructure to support the change. In another poll, about half of Americans said they would bike or use mass transit to work. Despite the shift in commuting habits, the Department of Transportation has proposed diverting some mass transit funds to maintain roads. For more information, go to

<http://features.csmonitor.com/environment/2008/08/13/how-much-less-can-americans-drive/>

Source: The Christian Science Monitor, August 13, 2008

### L.A. Plans to Extend Bike Paths

Los Angeles transportation officials are working on a plan to accommodate both motorists and bicyclists. They're planning a series of workshops to get public input on where bikeways are most needed. The paths should be completed by next June. One councilman wants to expand on the city's 1996 plan by adding more bike paths and storage lockers within his district. The head of the California Bicycling Association estimates there are 25 percent more bicyclists in Los Angeles County this year. Nationwide, bicyclist injuries and deaths cost \$5.4 billion a year, according to the National Safety Council. Despite current efforts, many L.A. commuters feel unsafe biking on city streets.

Source: Los Angeles Daily News, August 12, 2008



### **Motorcycle Fatalities Rise While Overall Traffic Deaths Drop**

Motorcyclist deaths accounted for nearly one in eight traffic fatalities in 2007. The number of motorcycle fatalities jumped 6.6 percent, while deaths of people in cars or trucks, on bicycles or on foot dropped by almost 2,000. This was the 10th straight year of increase, and the trend is likely to continue because of rising gas prices. Motorcycle deaths hit a low in 1997 but have increased 128 percent since. Ridership probably has become more dangerous mile per mile, because 27 states that used to require helmets in 1975 no longer do. Source: New York Times, August 15, 2008

### **Bike Sharing Kicks into Gear in D.C.**

Washington, D.C. started the nation's first high-tech bike sharing program in August. For a \$40 annual fee, commuters can rent 120 bikes at 10 racks mostly in the downtown area through SmartBike DC. Only those with memberships can rent the red three-speeds, and for now riders must provide their own locks. About half the fleet is now available for rent, and 150 people have purchased memberships so far. Bike-sharing programs are popular in European cities, especially Paris, and some U.S. cities have experimented with programs with limited success. Source: Washington Post, August 13, 2008

### **Organizers Take 'Safety Breaks' Program to the Road**

For four hours on a Friday, motorists at four New York Thruway travel plazas received brochures about sharing the road with trucks as part of the Safety Breaks program. The Thruway Authority, State Police and New York State Motor Truck Association hosted the event. The organizers wanted to emphasize the importance of taking frequent safety breaks at any of the travel plazas to stay alert while driving. For more information, go to <http://timesunion.com/AspStories/story.asp?storyID=713615> Source: Times Union, August 20, 2008

## **Latest Traffic Safety News**

### **Customized Tones Alert Others When Prius Approaches**

Start-up company Enhanced Vehicle Acoustics (EVA) is fitting Toyota Prius wheel wells with custom-made speakers that produce unique sounds whenever the car is moving at slow speeds and would normally be quiet. The company used seed money from the National Federation of the Blind to create the Pedestrian Awareness Noise-Emitting Device and Application (PANDA). No fatalities have resulted from a silent hybrid sneaking up on someone, but many tell tales of close calls. EVA can take a sound file and modify it to match the actions of the vehicle, becoming more drawn out as the car slows down, for example. In the future, drivers will be able to download their own "car-tone." The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is studying the safety of hybrids and plug-in cars, while 10 states and the U.S. Congress are considering Quiet Car bills that would require a minimum sound level. For more information, go to [http://www.forbes.com/2008/08/21/singing-prius-lotus-tech-science-cz\\_cf\\_0821prius.html](http://www.forbes.com/2008/08/21/singing-prius-lotus-tech-science-cz_cf_0821prius.html) Source: Forbes, August 21, 2008

### **Drivers Can Prevent Rear-end Crashes by Following from Safe Distance**

Global risk management company, DriveCam Inc. has reviewed rear-end crashes to see what impact following distance has on the likelihood of a crash. Rear-end crashes are the second most common claim for fleet operators, making up 17 percent of all claims with a cost of more than \$13,000 per claim. Most experts advise a minimum following distance of three or four seconds to prevent crashes. Researchers found if a driver is maintaining an unsafe following distance, he or she is no more likely to be struck from behind. However, drivers are three times more likely to hit the car in front of them when they maintain an unsafe following distance. More rear-end crashes happen in the farthest right lane than anywhere else. Based on its analysis, DriveCam recommends that drivers drive in the center lane when possible and maintain proper following distance and a safe speed.



Source: Automotive Fleet, August 17, 2008

### **EcoDriving Program Could Help Motorists Consume Less Fuel**

California and Colorado are supporting EcoDriving, a nationwide effort to help consumers save money at the gas pump, reduce fuel consumption and cut emissions. By following a set of recommended practices for driving and maintenance, a typical EcoDriver can improve mileage by about 15 percent without switching to a more fuel-efficient vehicle. It is estimated that if half of the drivers nationwide practiced EcoDriving, emissions could be reduced by about 100 million tons a year. Sample practices include avoiding tailgating, accelerating and braking properly, driving at the optimum highway speed and knowing when to use air conditioning. Maintenance practices such as using the right motor oil and keeping tires inflated at the correct pressure also help. September is "Green Check-up Month" nationwide. For more information, go to <http://www.autoalliance.org> Source: Automotive Fleet, August 19, 2008

### **Some Push for Return to 55 Speed Limit**

To help conserve fuel, reduce gas prices and maybe even save lives, some Americans are advocating a return to a national 55 mile per hour speed limit. Reinstating a national limit of 55 or 60 might be a tough sell after the first experiment failed when Congress lifted the mandate in 1995. Virginia Sen. John Warner introduced a bill last month to study the effects of a 60-mph national limit, and California Rep. Jackie Speier is proposing a limit of 60 in urban areas and 65 elsewhere. Currently, only 2 percent of the nation's roads have speed limits above 55, and congestion often reduces speed anyway. Some say a national speed limit would save lives, but others argue traffic fatalities have been declining without it. Source: USA Today, August 18, 2008

### **Many Drivers Admit to Texting and Driving**

Almost half of drivers ages 18 to 24 and more than a quarter of drivers from 25 to 34 say they text behind the wheel, according to a survey by FindLaw.com. Alaska, Minnesota, New Jersey and Washington recently banned texting while driving. Minnesota's Department of Public Safety conducted an informal survey of about 400 teenagers earlier this year. The teens said texting was their biggest distraction when behind the wheel and said it was the "most unsafe" behavior their friends engaged in while driving. For more information, go to <http://www.startribune.com/local/26864774.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQDUoaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc:Yyc:aUUJ> Source: Star Tribune, August 12, 2008

### **Wayward Wheels Pose Safety Risk**

Every year almost 1,000 tractor-trailers lose their tires while they're traveling on major roads. Many of the resulting crashes could have been avoided. The force of a runaway wheel going about 50 mph is enough to push a 3,000 pound car a foot sideways. Because there's no requirement to report wheels that come loose, only the instances that cause a crash are recorded. A commercial driver is responsible for checking his or her rig before hitting the road, but state inspectors worry some drivers are shirking that duty in the down economy. More than 200 drivers over the past two years have failed inspections because of wheel problems. Source: MY Fox-Kansas City, August 16, 2008

### **More Labor Day Travelers Opt for Buses, Trains than Last Year**

This Labor Day weekend, more travelers than in the past were riding buses and trains, while fewer traveled by car or plane, according to AAA. About 28.8 million people were expected to drive, a 1.1 percent decrease from 2007. Less than 4 million were expected to fly this holiday weekend. Bus and train travel was projected to increase 12.5 percent. It is likely fewer people would have traveled over the weekend if gas prices hadn't gone down recently. The economy is prompting many people to take "staycations" at home to save money on travel costs. Source: CNN Money, August 22, 2008



## Advancing Technology

### **Institute Tests Preventative Safety Features**

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) is testing new vehicle features intended to prevent crashes. Researchers are using data collected from law enforcement agencies across the country to determine how many crashes could have been prevented if the features were standard in all vehicles. "Our goal is to get manufacturers to make safer products," one IIHS researcher said. They're testing forward collision warning, emergency brake assistance, lane departure warning, blind spot detection, adaptive headlights and adaptive cruise control. IIHS' previous research helped standardize air bags and electronic stability control.

### **IBM Study Predicts Future of Automotive Industry**

The IBM Automotive 2020 Study reveals that the auto industry is dealing with significant change as consumers become more sophisticated. Industry experts predict that instead of purchasing one vehicle for multiple uses, drivers will buy or lease a vehicle that comes with access to a "garage" of different types of vehicles. Customers are demanding vehicles with advanced entertainment, safety and environmental features. Another trend will be "intelligent" cars with more navigational options and telematics. Study participants believe all cars will have some kind of hybridization by 2020, as well as more vehicles with hydrogen fuel cells and non-food-based bio fuels. IBM's study is based on interviews with 125 executives in 15 countries. IBM found that for an automaker to stand out, it must advance mobility, transform retail, standardize innovations, partner extensively and execute globally. For more information, go to <http://www-03.ibm.com/press/us/en/pressrelease/24922.wss>

Source: IBM news release, August 13, 2008

## News from USDOT

### **Acting Highway Safety Chief Starts in September**

David Kelly will start serving this month as acting administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Nicole Nason left in August after leading the agency for more than two years. Kelly is a Cornwall, N.Y. native. Source: Associated Press, August 21, 2008

### **Fatalities, Injuries Reached Historic Lows in 2007**

Traffic fatalities dropped again in 2007, reaching historically low levels. Last year the number of road deaths fell to 41,059, the lowest number since 1994. The fatality rate of 1.37 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled was the lowest on record. Injuries totaled 2.49 million, the lowest number since 1988 when the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration began collecting injury data. Motorcycle fatalities still represent a challenge, and ads about safe riding and drunk driving enforcement are available at <http://www.stopimpaireddriving.org/planners/crackdown2008/planner/index.cfm>. The "Drunk Driving. Over the Limit. Under Arrest." campaign runs through Labor Day. To view the 2007 fatality and injury report, go to <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811017.PDF>

Source: USDOT news release, August 14, 2008

### **Large Truck-Involved Fatalities Dropped in 2007**

The number of highway fatalities involving heavy trucks decreased again last year, in part because carriers tended to drive slower to conserve fuel. The number of deaths dropped 4.4 percent from 2006 to 2007, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The biggest drop, 5.2 percent, was among occupants of other vehicles involved in a crash with a large truck. Truck occupant fatalities fell 0.4 percent. The American Trucking Associations says new safety technologies and improvements under the current hours-of-service rule helped reduce those numbers.





Source: Business Fleet, August 21, 2008

### **Communities Get Millions to Increase Safety on Rural Roads**

The U.S. Department of Transportation presented 14 states, three counties and two parishes with \$14.7 million worth of Rural Safety Innovation Program (RSIP) funds. Half of the nation's traffic deaths happen on rural roads, which carry less than half of America's traffic. The awards are part of a \$287 million effort to help state and local governments reduce crashes on rural roads. Some of the projects grantees will undertake are severe weather warning systems, median barriers and signs warning of curves ahead and speed. For more information, go to <http://www.dot.gov/affairs/ruralsafety/>

Source: USDOT news release, August 27, 2008

### **International Traffic Safety News**

#### **Volunteers Transform into Walking Traffic Lights in China**

Volunteers in Guangzhou, China helped pedestrians cross the street with the help of T-shirts printed with traffic signals. The volunteers had red "stop" signs printed on the front and green "go" signs on the back of their shirts. They acted in sync with the traffic lights, so when the light was red they held pedestrians back to prevent jaywalking. More than 100 volunteers helped pedestrians cross at 20 major roads. Another 100 intersections will be covered the next week. For more information, go to [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-08/21/content\\_6957993.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-08/21/content_6957993.htm) Source: China Daily, August 21, 2008

### **Work-Home**

#### **College Presidents Ask Legislators to Lower Drinking Age**

More than 100 college presidents are asking lawmakers to consider lowering the drinking age from 21 to 18. The presidents, from schools such as Ohio State, Tufts and Colgate, signed the statement because they think the current drinking age leads to minors' binge drinking. In a statement, Duke President Richard Brodhead said the current law "pushes drinking into hiding, heightening its risks, including risks from drunken driving, and it prevents us from addressing drinking with students as an issue of responsible choice." Mothers Against Drunk Driving counters that lowering the drinking age would lead to more fatal car crashes. MADD urges parents to think twice about the safety at colleges whose presidents have signed the statement. In 1984, Congress decided to take back 10 percent of a state's highway funding if they did not follow the drinking age of 21. For more information, go to [http://www.newsday.com/news/printedition/longisland/ny-lidrin195806802aug19\\_0,4346240.story](http://www.newsday.com/news/printedition/longisland/ny-lidrin195806802aug19_0,4346240.story)

Source: Newsday, August 19, 2008

#### **Americans Want to Keep Legal Drinking Age at 21**

Most Americans are opposed to the push to lower the drinking age from 21 to 18, according to a Nationwide survey. Almost three-fourths of adults think lowering the drinking age would make alcohol more accessible to teens, and nearly half believe it would increase binge drinking among teens. More than half are less likely to vote for a legislator who supports lowering the limit or send their kids to colleges with "party school" reputations. Almost eight of 10 adults surveyed believe teen drinking contributes to drunk driving crashes and higher insurance rates. Nationwide and MADD will host a national symposium on binge drinking Nov. 6-7 in Washington, D.C. to bring parents into the discussion. For more information, go to [www.nationwide.com/stop-underage-drinking](http://www.nationwide.com/stop-underage-drinking)

Source: Nationwide news release, August 18, 2008



**Impaired, Underage Fans Most Likely to Be Served in Stands**

Underage and intoxicated fans find it relatively easy to purchase alcohol at professional sporting events, according to Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Its Substance Abuse Prevention and Research Program hired adults to appear underage or drunk in stadiums, and found it's easiest to get served in the stands. The overall sales rate to the "impaired" fans was 74 percent, while the ones who appeared underage could purchase alcohol 18 percent of the time. Researchers conducted the experiment at 16 baseball, football, basketball and hockey venues in five states. The lead researcher recommended stopping alcohol sales to fans in the stands, or at least training the mobile vendors. Study results appear in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.

Source: Join Together, August 21, 2008